

Are you having trouble with some of the kids in your class?

Are there a couple of kids who stand out and make teaching hard?

Occupational therapy services can help some kids, but there is more you can do with simply knowing some strategies and “tricks” for many of these kids.

Before sending in a referral for OT services, we are trying a new approach!

****Please read this packet before checking out equipment or trying strategies****

Kids today are dealing with a much faster paced world and many of them can't keep up so behavior begins to affect not only their learning, but often the learning of the entire class. If you have been struggling with one (or more) of these kids, try out the strategies we have provided. We are trying a “toolbox” of sorts to get you started. Much like checking out books at the library, we encourage you to try these strategies, tools and equipment. Please document what you are seeing so we can determine what the cause of behavior is and help you determine what kinds of tools work for the specific needs of your student.

We are working toward being able to provide more individualized intervention, but we need you to start the process in your classroom. Keep in mind, strategies that work one day might not work the next. It's not easy, and some days it will seem like nothing works. Please try these strategies for a month before completely discarding them. Kids that truly need sensory tools will use them...if they become toys and more of a distraction, we need to consider other reasons behind behavior. We can't tell kids to STOP a behavior, we need to replace it so they continue to get what they need for their system and that is how the toolbox can be helpful.

Executive functioning is under-developed in ALL children but some kids simply can't adapt or rise to our expectations. We want to help you determine if behavior is based on sensory issues, specific executive skills that are lagging or something more organic in nature. If nothing seems to work, fill out the questionnaire provided so we can begin to determine what specific skills might be preventing this child from being successful. Utilize the problem solving strategies at the bottom of that page to begin communicating with the child. A huge way to help these kids is through enlisting their help in determining what the problem is, coming up with solutions and monitoring how it is going. We can't define their problem or come up with solutions without their buy-in or ideas so this is a very different approach and likely why consequences may not have worked in the past. It's not easy or fast, but eventually, it does work.

Thank you for your commitment to our kids!

Sensory Processing: Consider all the senses when coming up with strategies. The following is a list of symptoms/behaviors you might see that could fall under a specific sensory area and tools you can try.

- Movement- Fidgeting, jumping, standing, can't calm down after recess, hyperactive (bull in a china store)
- Touch- Avoid touch or close contact, seeks out and touches everything, fidgets with hands
- Auditory- Sensitive to noise, trouble in groups or loud settings, never hears instructions
- Visual- Distracted and watching surroundings, avoids light, struggles in busy room, visually busy work is hard
- Oral- Sucks on clothes/hair, chews on erasers/nails to point of affecting participation

<u>Movement</u>	<u>Touch</u>	<u>Auditory</u>	<u>Visual</u>	<u>Oral</u>
Deep breathing	Compression vest	Noise cancelling headphones	Quiet corner	Water bottle or trips to fountain
Weighted pad/vest	Velcro on desk	Earplugs	Cover part of page	Gum
Heavy work	Heavy work	Quiet corner	Visual cues/cards	Sensory diet
Dynamic sitting	Sensory diet	Breaks to move	Decrease visual clutter	Chewy/crunchy Snacks
Breaks for movement	Dynamic sitting	Touch to get attention	Lamp vs. fluorescent lighting	Chewelry or pencil toppers
Thera-band on chair	Hand fidgets	Written instructions	Hoodies/hats	Chewy sippy cup
Sensory diet	Deep pressure	Picture cues		Weighted medicine ball
Jobs for teacher	Pencil fidgets	Bell for initiation		Heavy oral work
Standing to work	Personal bubble	Picture schedule		Ice
Chair push-up	Line buddy	MP3 or music		
Stretching/Yoga	Line placement	Vestibular input		
Compression shirt	Play-doh/thera-putty			
Timer	Vibration			
Line placement	Joint compression			
Line Buddy	Picture schedule			
Heavy walking	Weighted medicine ball			
Rocking/spin chair				
Weighted medicine ball				

Definitions and what these tools look like:

Deep Breathing- Count to 3 breathing in (“smell the flower”) and blow out counting to 5 (“blow out the candles”)

Weighted pad/vest- Weight can be on lap, shoulders or worn. Ideally it’s 10 min on then take a break but usually the child will know when they want it off. If you keep it on all day the nervous system gets used to it and it doesn’t have the same effect.

Dynamic sitting- Cushion, ball chair, t-stool, lying on stomach, standing at board or at a tall table/desk to work, balance board

Breaks for movement- Doesn’t have to be huge, even a walk to the drinking fountain will work

Thera-band on chair- Stretchy band that goes around legs of chair so child can push/pull and work leg muscles to feed nervous system

Chair push-up Sitting in chair, put hands under legs/hips and push up so legs and buns are up off the seat and hold

Sensory Diet- Any kind of movement based activity that can be integrated into their routine (before transitions do breathing and put chairs on top of desk, returning from recess do 10 wall pushups or chair pushups before sitting to work)

Jobs for teacher- Running errands (even made up ones) especially if it involves carrying something heavy not only feeds the nervous system but it allows for a change in environment and can help the student reset when you notice they are struggling

Standing to work- Many teachers are raising the height of their tables (or using bed risers) to provide alternative heights. You can also take the lower legs off of tables to provide for sitting on the floor while at the table. Making various “centers” in your room with different seating options will let all your students benefit from movement based input for work time

Stretching/yoga- This is usually an entire class activity and done when the teacher notices that most kids aren’t regulated or attending. It can be 30 seconds and done right at their seat so it is easy to transition back to work

Compression shirt- Some kids need the pressure of these tight fitting shirts to feel good in their own skin. These are usually put on in the morning in the nurse’s office and left there at the end of the day. Try these before we order for a specific child

Timer- When kids have trouble attending or beginning an activity it can be related to motivation. When they see how much time they have before a break (even a 30 second stretching break) can help them muster the energy to begin

Velcro on desk- Hook end of Velcro stuck to under-side of desk and child can rub their fingers along during listening time

Hand/Pencil fidgets- Squeeze balls, pencil toppers that twist or move or anything to fidget with during listening time, items that are soothing (smooth rock or worry stone)

Noise cancelling headphones- These allow for participation while dulling the noise often associated with classroom time (not to be used all day!! Meant to be periodic!)

Quiet corner- Providing a quiet work space for times when focus is difficult can be critical. Some teachers set up a study carrel with headphones/earplugs, beanbag (behind screen). Sometimes a tent or enclosure of some sort can be all the child needs to still hear what is going on but get the break they need.

Touch to get attention- When input doesn't register sometimes simply touching their shoulder can help.

Personal bubble- Picturing a bubble can help kids understand that sometimes people have bigger bubbles than others and not to go in those. Many kids needing movement or seeking touch are always in personal bubbles and this is tough especially for the kids who don't do well with touch. Allowing for these kids to stand in back during circle time or have a space that allows for a little bigger bubble can keep them participating while not setting off their sensory system

Line buddy- A student who respects and understands personal bubbles could be paired in line with one that struggles with standing/walking in line

Line placement- Kids that need to move or need input often struggle when standing/walking in line. Putting them in the back or giving them something to carry while in line can distract or give the input they need to be successful. When kids are in the front or back of line it decreases chance of unexpected touch by 50%

Hoodies/hats- Blocking out the visual world can be as simple as allowing for a hoodie or hat in certain environments/times

Written instructions- Kids that shut down miss verbal instruction so this allows them to have something visually right in front of them to refer back to if they get stuck

Visual/Picture cues- Providing a way to let the student see what is expected, what the end result is or what the motivator is can help with starting work. It also fills in gaps and allows them to figure out what they might have missed in verbal instruction. Using a break card as a picture or visual tool can also help kids who are embarrassed or can't find the words for times when they need help.

Bell for initiation- A different sound to indicate "go" can sometimes make more of an impression than simply saying "begin"

Cover part of the page- Kids who get overwhelmed with visual detail often can't start working because they shut down just as you set the busy page they must complete in front of them. Covering part of this and chunking the work can help.

Lamps vs. Fluorescent lighting- The bright lights of a classroom can feel like razor blades to some students. Providing alternative lighting options (even for just certain times) can help these kids focus and stay learning

Water bottle- Oral input is critical for focused attention so allowing kids to sip on water or move to get a drink can help

Gum- pending approval from administration and if used as a tool not a toy, gum can be one of the best tools we have

Chewy or crunchy snacks- Bagels, licorice, jerky, taffy, carrots, pretzels

Chewelry or pencil toppers- (Keep in mind there will be slobber with this one so determine if this is something your system can handle) dog tags, necklaces even fidgets or pencil toppers made for chewing

Chewy Sippy cup- These provide water and a more socially appropriate way to chew without the drool potential. They look like sippy cups but have a chewy mouth piece that is designed for chewing

Deep pressure- Have the child hug themselves tight, push hands together and hold, shrug shoulders and relax. Any time you touch the child use firm, deep pressure.

Play-doh/Thera-putty- Squishing,- Smashing between fingers, rolling. All can help with fine motor, pressure of pencil on page
Heavy work- Anything that makes the muscles work- carrying books, stacking chairs, games like wheelbarrow, chair pushups
Vibration- Hand held massager on hands, arms, legs

Decrease visual clutter- Cover busy bookcases, make corners of room with nothing on walls or hanging overhead

Joint compression- Teach the child to gently push/pull fingers at all joints, push hands together

Heavy walking- Walking while lunging down and using big muscles of the legs, walking on tip toes or with toes in the air

Rocking/spin chair- Rocking chairs can be calming and alerting, spinning chairs are alerting and kids can wiggle without banging into their neighbor. If they spin do no more than 10 revolutions each way even if they think they want more. Invert the head. Be careful with this one because many kids can only handle the rocking that is forward/backward!!

Picture schedule- This can even be a quick thing made from pictures taken on a smart phone. It is simply a way to provide pictures to show the progression of their day. It can be words but pictures process faster. Knowing what is coming allows for discussion re: how to handle something that has been hard in the past, processing time to figure out what that time might require and knowing what is coming decreases anxiety-especially when routine is needing to be changed (like a substitute teacher or assembly)

MP3 or music- Calming music in class or in headphones can help kids who struggle with times that are loud. When kids are always telling others to be quiet it can be a way to manage auditory input that is too much.

Vestibular input- Anything that involves tipping the head is vestibular. Vestibular input helps with auditory processing so rolling on their stomach over a ball to put their head down, swinging, stretches that involve moving head, rocking chair. Be careful with this one because some kids get worse when their head is tipped out of neutral.

Weighted medicine ball- Heavy work to lift and move. Good activity before seat time or for transition times

Heavy oral work- Sucking apple sauce, pudding or yogurt through a straw

OTHER COMMON ISSUES THAT OCCUR AT SCHOOL AND POSSIBLE REASONS BEHIND BEHAVIOR

Standing/walking in lines- Standing and walking in line involves being bumped into, boredom with waiting and walking at a pace that might not work for every system. Give kids an agenda to complete as they walk like “I spy” or counting the number of red objects in their head. Bubble in the mouth helps with quiet transitions.

Humming/verbal processing- This is a common sensory anchor or way a child is attempting to self-regulate. They can like the way it feels in their mouth, or like the sound it is making (whether it is to alert them or drown out other noise in their space). Replace this with “tongue games” (push tongue into cheek and hold), gum or straw/water.

Fidgeting, tapping hands/feet/objects- This provides proprioceptive input and feeds the nervous system for regulation. Telling a child to stop doing this prevents them from getting the input they were attempting to get to focus. The goal is to REPLACE this behavior because it does serve a purpose to the child. Possible replacements include fidgets, deep pressure into hands, Thera band around chair, vibrating toy, heavy work before working, dynamic sitting options.

Times of frustration or outbursts- Refrain from talking to the student in “the moment” because when their system is in fight/flight they can’t use the logical part of their brain. Allow for a break or change in scenery before talking. Picture prompts and simple “first/then” commands can be used to help the child redirect or utilize a strategy for resetting their nervous system. Try to create environments that are organized, clutter free, dim lights with calming/quiet music. Timers help them visually see how long they need to exert energy before a break and can be a great tool to get more work out of them too.

Work Refusal- Often this can be related to an executive skill weakness or not knowing WHAT to do or HOW to do something. Providing discrete, visual prompts or instructions can help, setting a timer with a clear motivator for when the work timer has gone off and allowing for a sense of control over their environment can be a good start. Maybe math or English are an option, or starting with 2 or 4 problems knowing the reward at the end of 4 is bigger than 2. Keep in mind that pushing and reminding often doesn’t help and if they are refusing to work, they aren’t engaging in academics anyway so providing an alternative to ease them into participation isn’t such a terrible thing.

Once they experience success through the baby steps you've provided they will likely enjoy how that feels and try again. If they have some lagging skills you are able to identify with their help or the checklist provided. They might be able to figure out WHY they couldn't start in the first place and then you can work through ways to help them. Consider also that the child may need more time to process than their peers so setting a timer to help them start can sometimes work. Often a "first/then" visual can help (see attached example).

Trouble with changes in routine- When change occurs, kids who depend on structure and predictability for self-regulation often melt. Preparing them through picture schedules, taking time to talk about possible problems that could arise and incorporating heavy work should all be considered. Visual timers help kids see how long they have until their next transition. Some kids that have trouble with noise or visual stimulation have a really hard time at assemblies and sporadic special events at school. These may not be appropriate for them to participate in (especially if it hasn't gone well in the past) or sometimes if they can be prepared about the subject matter of the assembly, they can have control over where they stand and you can have them focus on certain things (like how many times they speaker said the word "bully" when you know the content is about school relationships etc.)

IF A TOOL DOESN'T MEET THE NEED AND CHANGE BEHAVIOR, THEN THE PROBLEM LIKELY ISN'T STEMMING FROM A SENSORY ISSUE (YOU SHOULD SEE A CHANGE IN 24 HOURS). CONSIDER OTHER IDEAS LIKE EXECUTIVE FUNCTIONING SKILLS THAT MIGHT BE WEAK AND AFFECTING A CHILD'S ABILITY TO DO WHAT IS REQUESTED.

FREQUENCY FOR BREAKS AND WORK TIME BASED ON AGE:

KINDERGARTEN STUDENTS NEED BREAKS EVERY 15 MIN

1ST GRADE EVERY 20 MIN

2ND GRADE EVERY 25 MIN

3RD GRADE EVERY 30 MIN

Please feel free to contact me with any questions or for PDF/Word copies of any attachments.

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Sensory Box Check-out

Date

Teacher

Student

Equipment

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